Opioid Information Sheet (Adult)

Opioid pain relievers are powerful and dangerous medications that are used to relieve early and long-lasting cancer and non-cancer pains. They are not right for all patients or for all types of pain. You are being given this sheet to tell you about the risks of using opioid pain relievers. Your doctor will keep in mind these risks along with benefits and work with you to decide whether your medication needs to be adjusted or stopped.

**Dose levels:** All opioid pain relievers are matched to an equal dose of morphine in milligrams (mg) per day. This is called morphine milligram equivalent (MME).

- **Low doses** - doses up to 50 MME
  - 5 hydrocodone-acetaminophen 10-325mg tablets per day
  - 3 oxycodone 10mg tablets per day

- **Moderate doses** - doses between 51 and 90 MME
  - 6 to 9 hydrocodone-acetaminophen 10-325mg tablets per day
  - 4 to 6 oxycodone 10 mg tablets per day

- **High doses** - doses more than 90 MME
  - 10 or more hydrocodone-acetaminophen 10-325mg tablets per day
  - 7 or more oxycodone 10mg tablets per day

**High doses are dangerous and more likely to cause side effects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Early Side Effects (with early and short-term use; may continue with long-term use)</th>
<th>Possible Late Side Effects (after taking the medication regularly for two weeks, hard to predict and may happen suddenly)</th>
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| - Hard stools (constipation)  
- Upset stomach or vomiting  
- Feeling sleepy  
- Dizziness and falls, including passing out  
- Itching, redness or rash  
- Slow or shallow breathing  
- Reduced nervousness  
- Confusion or forgetfulness  
- Muscle twitching (at moderate to high doses)  
- Lower testosterone or estrogen levels  
  - Decreased sex drive/libido  
  - Sexual dysfunction  
- Death  
  - Usually due to respiratory arrest (stopping breathing) | - Tolerance  
  - Needing more of the medication for the same pain relief  
- Alloodynia  
  - Feeling pain due to non-painful things, such as wearing clothes or light touch  
- Opioid-induced hyperalgesia  
  - Increase in feelings of pain related to the use of opioid pain relievers  
  - Related to tolerance and alldynia  
  - Pain may often be in a larger or different area than the original pain  
- Major depression or other mood disorders  
- Generalized anxiety and panic attacks  
- Memory loss and distraction  
- Insomnia  
  - Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep  
- Nerve damage (neuropathy)  
  - Due to the creation of toxic metabolites of some opioids  
- Physical Dependence  
  - Withdrawal symptoms when the opioid medications are stopped which may include increased pain, shaking, or nervousness  
- Death  
  - Usually due to respiratory arrest (stopping breathing) |
How to Store Medication

- *NOT* in your bathroom medicine cabinet
- *NOT* above your stove
- *NOT* in a hot car
- Away from heat, light, and moisture
- Away from children
- Away from pets
- Recommend a safe or other locked box or locked drawer

How to Get Rid of Leftover Medication

- Talk to your pharmacist
- Contact your local police station
- Look for national drug take-back days

### Possible Issues with Ongoing Opioid Use

Certain psychosocial problems may occur due to genetic predisposition and environmental causes.

**Misuse** - Taking more medication than prescribed to get rid of pain  
**Abuse** - Taking the medication for any reason other than pain  
**Addiction** – Continuing to look for and use these medications even though it may result in bad legal, social, physical, or mental health outcomes  
**Diversion** - Giving away or selling your medication to anyone else - *This is against the law.*

### Special Warning about Opioids

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently announced a new warning. This warning is about the combination of opioids and benzodiazepines. Benzodiazepines are powerful medications that are used to help people with anxiety and/or panic disorders. They can also help people who have seizures and muscle spasms.

When opioids and benzodiazepines are taken at the same time, patients have increased risk of dangerous side effects. These side effects include:

- Extreme sleepiness
- Having a hard time breathing or extremely slow breathing
- Coma
- Death

It is important to be aware of these risks. Make sure you take your medication exactly as prescribed by your doctor. If you are taking an opioid and a benzodiazepine at the same time, do not take more than prescribed. When you take your medication correctly, you decrease your risk for these dangerous side effects.